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Our Nuclear Posture Is at Stake

Members of Congress are raising sharp but appropriate questions over the U.S.-Chinese nuclear-cooperation agreement initialed by President Reagan during his April trip to Peking.

The negotiation of the nuclear agreement was an important achievement. The Chinese would benefit from access to American nuclear-power-reactor technology. The pact would give the U.S. nuclear industry a shot at up to \$20 billion in sales to China in the years ahead. Perhaps most important, the agreement would give the Chinese an added stake in close relations with the United States.

But, unless the Administration can provide adequate assurances that China is not currently aiding Pakistan's nuclear-weapons program and will not do so in the future, Congress should stop the nuclear-cooperation agreement from taking effect.

Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) disclosed in a speech last week that, according to worried officials inside the Administration itself, Pakistan received design help from the Chinese in its nuclear-weapons program in the late 1970s. There is some evidence, it seems, that Peking is still aiding Pakistan in the development of centrifuges that could be used for the production of bomb-grade enriched uranium.

For several years Pakistan has been reported to be pursuing a nuclear-weapons-development program. Such reports have aroused widespread concern because of the danger of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan, as well as the possibility that Pakistani-made nukes would find their way into the volatile Middle East.

Pakistan has denied that it is seeking to become a nuclear-weapons state. The Reagan Administration

has officially accepted those assurances while admitting to continued concern over certain aspects of Pakistan's nuclear-power program.

China is not a party to the international nuclear non-proliferation treaty aimed at preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to additional countries. In talks leading to the nuclear-cooperation pact, top Chinese leaders gave public assurances that China would not help other nations obtain or develop nuclear weapons, but they refused to accept concrete procedures aimed at verifying adherence to this pledge.

The Administration ultimately accepted the Chinese assurances. Now Peking is irked at suggestions that the nuclear-cooperation agreement may be aborted unless it is amended to give greater assurance of compliance.

The controversy could seriously affect the U.S.-Chinese relationship. Because that relationship has become an important factor in the global balance of power, such a development would be extremely unfortunate. The Administration seems inclined to swallow its own concern over the China-Pakistan nuclear relationship and subject the nuclear-cooperation agreement for congressional approval.

If the Administration is willing to make full disclosure of relevant intelligence to the appropriate congressional committees, and if that intelligence indicates that the Chinese are no longer a party to the more questionable aspects of the Pakistan nuclear-power program, Congress should allow the agreement to become final. But in the absence of such information it has no responsible choice but to disapprove it. To act otherwise would be to make a mockery of this country's entire posture against the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.